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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS FROM THE SOUTH

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: A political insider asserts that President Obasanjo (OBJ) will not only play a decisive role in determining Nigeria's next president and vice president, but that he has not relinquished the notion of an extended term. Political candidates beware -- even when OBJ dons his kingmaker attire, he reportedly flashes hot and cold on aspirants. The South East geopolitical zone continues to agitate for the presidency, but fails to unify behind a candidate. In the big news in the South East, the Anambra Appeals court has overturned Governor Ngige's election, declaring All Progressive's Grand Alliance candidate, Peter Obi, the winner. Meanwhile, the Biafran secessionist group, MASSOB, has been active lately, circulating Biafran currency, flying the Biafran flag, and calling for a stay-at-home strike on August 26. In the South West, Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu finally caved to presidential pressure and reversed the establishment of 37 new local councils. However, most of the "quid" in this arrangement is still outstanding, with the federal government only releasing one-third of the funds withheld from Lagos for almost two years. End Summary.

NATIONAL SNAPSHOT: OBJ PLAYS EENY, MEENY, MINEY, ME?

¶12. (C) Members of Nigeria's political elite continue to report that President Obasanjo is resolved to play an active role in determining Nigeria's next top leadership. Echoing what we heard from Kaduna State Governor Makarfi (reftel), former Defense Minister T.Y. Danjuma, told us OBJ is determined to "block" Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) and VP Atiku Abubakar (Atiku) from getting the PDP presidential nomination. Asked who OBJ supports, Danjuma chuckled, "why, himself, of course." Danjuma maintained that despite having had his share of disagreements with the president concerning Nigeria's military reform, he and OBJ remain close. "I talk with him almost every day and trust me, this man wants to continue to be president," Danjuma stressed. (Comment: Danjuma may not be as close a presidential friend as he portrayed himself. He has axes to grind with the president that go beyond military reform. For instance, Danjuma has been leading the efforts to ally his home region, the Middle Belt, with southern geo-political zones, and these efforts appear to run contrary to any plans Obasanjo might prefer. End Comment).

SOUTH-SOUTH SNAPSHOT: Rivers State Governor Odili
Maneuvering for President, or Vice President

¶13. (C) According to some contacts, Rivers State Governor Peter Odili's stock with OBJ has fallen temporarily. The president is reportedly annoyed with his erstwhile favorite for visibly hitting the campaign trail prematurely, without getting the presidential green light. (Some observers would say this confirms that Obasanjo has not completely divorced himself from the idea of self-succession). In addition, sources say despite having cut the ribbon on Odili's two new private planes, the President frowned on their purchase, viewing them as excessive. When he learned Odili contemplated using the planes in his election efforts, Obasanjo felt that he had been maneuvered to appear to be sanctioning Odili's efforts, according to one observer.

¶14. (C) Finally, Odili annoyed OBJ by cozying up to IBB and his allies. Odili apparently had angled toward IBB thinking him a more likely PDP presidential candidate than VP Atiku. (It was no coincidence that one of the first and largest IBB campaign offices is in Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital). In this vein, Odili reportedly gave Rivers State National Political Reform Conference Delegate Albert Horsfall a handsome sum of "traveling money," which Horsfall used liberally at the national confab. Horsfall is an "IBB man," having been IBB's top security man at one point during the military presidency. Horsfall also wielded a powerful (and probably, "enriching") position as IBB's director of Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), the predecessor of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Odili had to reach an entente with Horsfall, heretofore a political enemy from a rival part of Rivers State, in order for the governor to be more attractive to IBB as a potential

running mate.

15. (C) Perhaps learning that he had angered the president, Odili is attempting to restore himself in the president's good graces. In a turn of self-effacement, Odili co-sponsored a pro-Obasanjo public lecture and book launch in Accra, Ghana on August 13. Odili hosted this event with Nasarawa Governor Adamu, a notorious OBJ yes-man, who has been mentioned as a presidential dark horse. Odili may have recalculated that the closer he sticks to Adamu, the less likely will he anger OBJ and the more likely he is to get the president's support for his vice-presidential ambitions.

16. (C) Last, the South-South political class is shouting that Nigeria's next president must hail from the Niger Delta. "Second-best, i.e. the vice-presidency, will not do." However, this rallying cry is basically a sop to the Niger Delta population, who are still riled following the zone's bold, but failed, bid for increased resource control at the recently concluded national confab. Among the governors, this declaration is a hollow lie. In truth, three of the zone's governors have their eyes on the vice presidency and will not divert their gaze not their activities notwithstanding the public disclaimer.

SOUTH-EAST SNAPSHOT: Gubernatorial Election Overturned; Zone wants Presidency, but No Candidate; Biafra Day "Stay-AT-Home" Strike

17. (C) Following a two-year court battle and over 500 witnesses, the Anambra State Elections Tribunal ruled August 12 that APGA candidate Peter Obi was the legitimate 2003 gubernatorial winner. Current governor Chris Ngige, who had already been ousted from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) will appeal. However, Obi likely will prevail at the appellate level as well. Most people believe Obi won the election. Nevertheless, APGA Chairman Victor Umeh told us the party still had to "strike a deal" with the PDP national hierarchy in Abuja before the court would take the risky step of ousting a sitting PDP governor, no matter how estranged from the party. Under the deal, Ngige nemesis and OBJ insider, Chris Uba, gets "taken care of," Umeh stated, without offering further details. However, problems may be on the horizon. Governor designate Obi is not fully aware of the arrangement and may balk when asked to implement it. According to Umeh, Deputy Governor Okey Udeh who remained close to Chris Uba, was instrumental in brokering the deal between APGA and the PDP. Presumably, the reward for his good services may be to remain as deputy governor or to have a place in Obi's cabinet despite being in a different party.

18. (C) The South East continues to clamor for the 2007 presidency, but has not progressed toward identifying a consensus candidate. Ethno-political groups, such as the pan-Igbo, Ohaneze Ndigbo, meet weekly. The South East has been strategizing with the Middle Belt on a potential presidential/vice-presidential ticket. This is the latest in a series of cross-zonal overtures. During the national confab, the Middle Belt sought common cause with the South-South, but the partnership promptly disintegrated. Similarly, for a brief period, all three southern zones acted in concert during the national conference, but eventually reverted to their particular interests. The Middle Belt is the orphan of the North. It has the most to gain from forming a lasting alliance with the South. The South East sees itself as the orphan in the South. It is uncertain if there is more glue that can bind the two zones together save their mutual perception of political marginalization.

19. (SBU) Meanwhile, the secessionist group, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) as been active lately. MASSOB reportedly is circulating Biafran currency and flying the Biafran flag. Residents of the region have been urged to stay at home on August 26, Biafran day. The "stay-at-home" strike MASSOB organized in October 2004 was respected widely, impacting Igbo-owned business ventures throughout the South, including in Lagos and Port Harcourt. We anticipate similar, if not greater, adherence to this upcoming strike.

SOUTH WEST SNAPSHOT: Lagos Caves but Money Still Withheld

110. (C) After an almost two-year stand-off, Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu yielded to federal pressure to disband the 37 new local councils he had created. However, Tinubu may have been outmaneuvered in this long-running tussle with the federal government (FG). Tinubu thought he had reached a deal with Abuja whereby he would rescind the creation of 37 (of a total of 57) local government councils and the FG would release the local government funds it has withheld, on the premise that the new councils were unconstitutional. However, the FG only released one-third of the funds and the

FG may insist on new local government elections prior to releasing the remainder.

¶11. (C) Last year, the Supreme Court ruled the new councils illegal, but said the president had no authority to withhold a state's funds. At the time, Obasanjo "interpreted" that judgment to mean that he did not have to release the funds until the illegal councils were disbanded. The call for fresh elections represents a new FG conditionality. Lagos is controlled by the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Of the seventeen states comprising Southern Nigeria, it is the only one not in the hands of the PDP. With a population of between six and ten million, Lagos is a big electoral prize. The FG wants new elections to see if the PDP can begin to erode AD support and to help lay the groundwork for 2007. That Obasanjo out-foxed Tinubu, his rival for the unofficial mantle of political leader of the Yorubas, is also a nice bonus.

Comment

¶12. (C) The uniting theme in these "reports from the provinces" is OBJ's current political strength. From our perch in Southern Nigeria, OBJ may not have sufficient support to prolong his tenure, he nevertheless probably wields veto-power regarding who will become Nigeria's next president. However, Nigeria is dynamic and the political cycle here is a fast, boom and bust one. OBJ rides high today, but could easily see his fortunes reverse tomorrow.

End Comment.

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